

MANITOBA

HISTORICAL AND

Scientific Society,

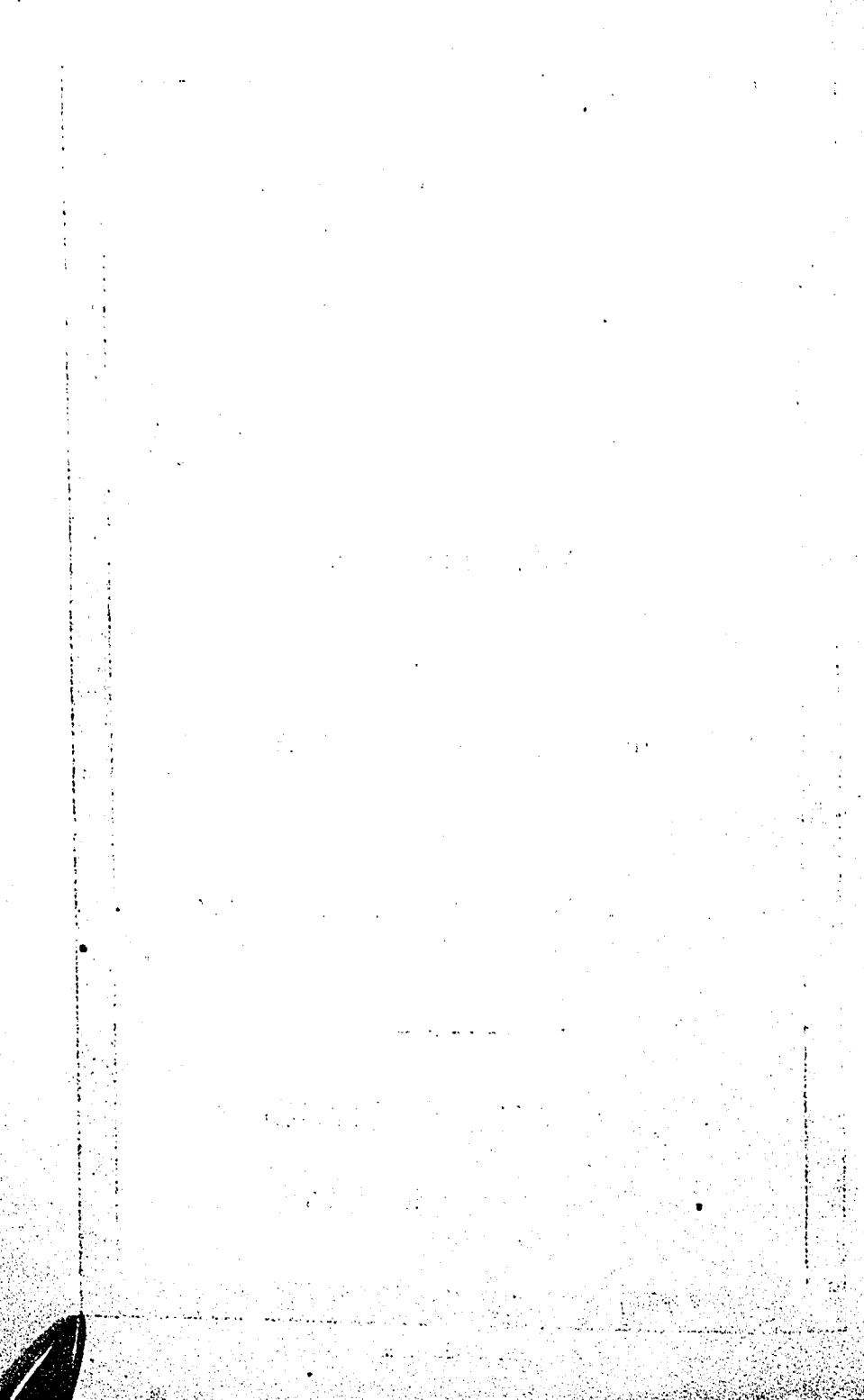
WINNIPEG.

TRANSACTION NO. 6.

The Sources of North-Western History.

MR. WM. DENNIS,

Journalist, Winnipeg.



The Sources of North-Western History.

The regular monthly meeting of the above society took place in their rooms Thursday night and was largely attended.

After some routine business the following were elected members: Lt.-Gov. Aikins, Mr. Nichol, Merchants' Bank; H. B. Mitchell, G. B. Gordon, W. G. Bell and James Fenny.

Messrs. Bryce, Panton and Whitcher were named a Special Committee to arrange for the appointment of a delegate to the next meeting of the Royal Society, at Ottawa.

METEOROLOGICAL PHENOMENON.

The following letter, accompanied by a meteorological specimen, was read from Rev. A. B. Baird, of Edmonton:

I send to you a specimen of a curiosity recently found in the neighborhood in the hope that some meteorologist belonging to the Historical and Scientific Society may be able to send us an explanation of it. George Long a farmer in the Sturgeon River settlement about 10 miles from here found near his house a snowball lying in a little depression in the snow. The snowball was about the size of a man's fist and not very regularly formed. The remarkable thing was that there was imbedded in the surface of this snowball and lying in the depression around it a large number (perhaps a thousand) of little golden colored globules varying in size from that of large shot to that of a pin point—the smaller sizes predominating. The little pellets at first were mostly covered with a grayish coat which scaled off very readily. Then comes the bright yellow layer and underneath that a hard whitish-grey substance like stone.

I enclose you some of the little globules and would be glad to hear any explanation of the curiosity that is forthcoming.

Many thanks for the kind mention in the Society reports about my specimens of coal and iron and especially for the analysis of the iron made at your instance by Prof. Chapman. I will take advantage of some "chance" this spring to send some specimens of coal better than the former I hope, which you may use at your discretion, distribute them for instance where they will do the most good.

I am collecting materials at present for an article on the Legends of the Cree Indians. I began it for my own amusement but if it turns out decently I shall hand it over to the Society. I am yours faithfully,

ANDREW B. BAIRD.

The corresponding secretary was instructed to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of the letter.

SOURCES OF NORTH-WESTERN HISTORY.

Mr. Wm. Beattie, a young journalist of this city, and formerly of Halifax, N. S., then read the following interesting paper on the above subject—

In view of this being the last public meeting of the Historical and Scientific Society for the season, it has been suggested to me that it would not only be a fitting termination of the

year's work, but also of much use to members of the Society, and to others who may take an interest in the history of our great Northwest, to obtain information as to the historical periods of interest—the books bearing upon these, the collections containing rare works about the Northwest, and to the chief sources from which books could be obtained giving the information desired. Accordingly, I have waited upon prominent members of the Historical Society, and will place before you the results of my investigations.

AN INTERESTING HISTORY.

Probably no portion of the Dominion has been the scene of such varied and exciting incidents as the ground occupied by this society in its work, viz., the country to the north and west of Lake Superior. This includes Hudson's Bay and its shores, where for two centuries not only a large trade has centered, but where naval combats and war-like operations on a large scale were at different times carried on. It includes, likewise, the field of discovery of many who in the interest of science as well of trade have penetrated our vast North-western solitudes and have discovered various points in the Arctic ocean. On these plains, too, two giant companies engaged in fur trading, and for years carried on rival and hostile operations. Within these wilds early French explorers also carried the flag of their country and in some parts took possession earlier than the British. On the west shore of the continent early navigators discovered the coast which was afterwards reached overland by Canadian explorers; while in Oregon and the neighboring country a great fur trade was carried on by the Americans. Where the city of Winnipeg now stands was planted the first settlement in this region, and about its history cluster events of great, even of tragic interest. Such a field is well worth the study and investigation of any amongst us whose historically inclined; and something has already been done by this Society in forming a taste for such studies and in bringing out many interesting facts connected with the country. The year now closing has been a most fruitful one for the Society, and the papers read and printed remain as a permanent result of the winter's work.

COLLECTIONS OF NORTH-WESTERN LITERATURE.—Probably the best collection of works on the Northwest is to be found in the library of the Hudson's Bay Company in London. That ancient institution has, during two centuries of its existence, had opportunities of becoming possessed of all literature on the subject. On Lime street, accordingly, the student of North-western history will find a full collection in the possession of the great company, and much valuable historical knowledge. This library contains no less than 220 volumes, almost every one of which bears upon the field of operations of this society. The Dominion library at Ottawa contains also a large number of works of the same character. Mr. Charles Lindsay, of Toronto, son-in-law of the late William Lyon McKenzie, is said to have an excellent collection. Our own society has also a good beginning, while Prof. Bryce, the Corresponding Secretary of this society, who has made the matter a specialty, has, without doubt, the best collection

of this kind in the Northwest. The student of Northwest history could spend several days in the professor's library with the greatest pleasure and instruction.

A WIDE FIELD.

To any members of this society who have the means and inclination for pursuing studies favored by the society, a wide opportunity is still open for obtaining books and other historical materials. Many of the British booksellers now make a specialty of American books, and a department of Americana is found in many of their catalogues. In London, one can find anything and almost everything that the world contains, and especially for old and rare books is this the place of search. Bernard Quaritch, bookseller, Piccadilly, W., has a very complete collection of American books, and he knows how to charge for them. C. Herbert, 60 Gower street, E.C., has also a good collection and is very reasonable in prices. One of the best and cheapest places in London to obtain rare American books is at E. W. Stubbs, 30 Museum street (near the British Museum). On our own side of the Atlantic several booksellers have paid considerable attention to the collection of a stock of such books, and offer them at reasonable rates. Piddington, 248 Young's street, Toronto, is one of these. Perhaps the best of all dealers in this continent are Robert Clarke & Co., Cincinnati, whose catalogue, with prices, is in the possession of the Society.

ABOUT HUDSON'S BAY.

While it might well come within the scope of the Society's work to deal with works of travel and explorations in the Arctic regions, the field of literature in this department is so wide that we cannot undertake to touch it. Moreover, we do not wish it to be understood that Manitoba is so near the Arctic regions that we are specially bound to pay any particular attentions to the regions of eternal ice and snow. The district around Hudson's Bay, however, as having been the theatre of so much history and a subject of great interest in connection with the route by Hudson's Bay to Britain, deserves our best attention. Among the books most deserving of perusal are "An Account of Hudson's Bay," by Arthur Dobbs, 1744; "A Voyage to Hudson's Bay," by Henry Ellis; "Account of Six Years' Residence in Hudson's Bay," by Joseph Robson, in 1758, and the "American Traveller," 1770. These works are all taken up, as well as the blue book of 1749, with the immediate coast of Hudson's Bay. A number of French writers have also discussed the events happening on the bay, as M. De Bacqueville de la Potherie and M. Jerome. So far as the interior was concerned, however, the Hudson's Bay Company interest took a start from the time the company decided to penetrate the interior. Their inland expeditions were placed under the charge of an intrepid officer, who has left us a most graphic and valuable volume of his "adventures and discoveries." This was Samuel Hearne, who is known as the American Park, and who published his work in 1793. He was not only a discoverer of the Copper Mine river, but built forts for the company, among others Fort Cumberland, on the Saskatchewan. Another adventurer, who under the Hudson's Bay Company's auspices penetrated the country, and left us an interesting work, is Daniel Ureville, who published an octavo volume in 1790.

EARLY FRENCH SETTLERS.

First, as figuring on the way to the Northwest was Champlain, whose travels are recorded in four volumes, published in Quebec and found in the library of this Society. In 1697 the Recollet priest Louis Hennepin, published at Utrecht, in French, his new discovery of a great country, though the region described lies rather to the south of the field of operations of our society. One of the most amusing and perhaps least valuable of the early French travels whose works we have is Baron De Lahontan, who pub-

lished at Amsterdam in 1703, and at the Hague in 1715. His works are now very rare, but were quite popular in their day. In the library of this society is a valuable six volume edition of the works of Father Charlevoix, a member of the Jesuit society, published in Paris in 1744. From these volumes much of the information we have of New France is obtained. The Jesuit relations also found in our library and published by the Government of Canada will be found of service in studying this period. Much useful information may also be obtained as to the early French times from Parkman's beautifully written works, published in Boston, and also from an excellent work in two volumes, "Les Canadiens de l'ouest," published by Joseph Tasse in Montreal, 1878.

NORTHWESTERN TRADERS.

After New France had fallen into the hands of Britain a daring race of Canadian traders sprang up, who penetrated the Northwest and became formidable rivals to the Hudson's Bay Company. The leading spirits of the Northwesters were daring Highlanders who had fled from Britain on account of their Jacobitism. The voyageurs were French. The deeds of many of those leading spirits of the time have come down by tradition to our times. It is only an occasional and partial glimpse that we get of their wild life from the books written about the Northwest during that period. In 1778, Jonathan Carver, an American traveller, penetrated the interior of North America. Born in Connecticut, he served as a captain in the war against the French in Canada. He published an account of his travels some ten years before, which gave a report of a determined effort made by him to cross through the Northwest to the Pacific Ocean. He failed in his attempt. A somewhat delapidated copy of his travels, with boards for the title page, will be found in the Society's library. In 1809, Alexander Henry published an account of the expedition undertaken by him between the years 1780 and 1778 in which he describes his travels as far as Lake Athabasca, in company with Stroblaser, one of the magnates of the Northwest Company. The most interesting and reliable work is that of Alexander McKenzie, published in 1801. This celebrated man had the honor of discovering the Arctic Ocean at the part where empties the river that bears his name. He also, in 1793, crossed the Rocky Mountains, first of white men north of Mexico, and reached the Pacific Ocean. A book now very rare, is that of Daniel W. Harmon, published in 1830, of a journey of 5,000 miles taken by him northwest of Montreal. He gives an account of nineteen years' residence in the Northwest. I may mention, in passing, that his daughter still survives in Ottawa. In 1821, by absorption into the Hudson's Bay Company, the Northwest Company ceased its existence.

AMERICAN TRADERS AND EXPLORERS.

While the Hudson's Bay Company and Northwesters were struggling for the fur trade in the North, an American of great energy, John Jacob Astor, was pushing the fur trade to the upper lakes and on the Pacific coast. Washington Irving's "Astoria," gives a most interesting and graphic account of these operations. One of the agents employed by him was Alexander Ross, well known to the older inhabitants as Sheriff Ross, whose property lay in the city of Winnipeg. In a work published in 1839 the writer gave an account of the early settlement of the Columbia river. After severing his connection with this fur company he joined the Hudson's Bay Company, crossed the mountains from the Pacific and settled on the Red River. He is also the author of several other works, among them being his "Red River Settlement," published in 1866. Among the other employees of Astor was a Montreal Frenchman, Gabriel Franchère, who, after enduring many perils on the Pacific coast, performed a memorable journey. In 1814, crossing the Rocky Mountains, down the Saskatche-

wan river, across Lake Winnipeg, through the country to Fort William and down the lakes to Montreal. His narrative published in French, is now very rare. A very much battered copy is in the possession of Daniel Carey, of this city. An American translation of this work appeared in 1834. One of the most striking and successful exploratory expeditions in the North-western United States was that of Lewis and Clarke. In 1804-05 these travellers, starting from St. Louis, ascending the Missouri, crossed over the mountains to the Pacific. An excellent account of their journey is given in the three-volume edition published in London in 1815. Among the most interesting accounts of the Astor fur traders is that of Ross Cox, published in two volumes in the year 1832, of his journey to the west coast of America by way of Cape Horn, and a six years' residence on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, along the Columbia River, and of the romantic and eventful return across the mountains, very much in the same line as Franchère in the year 1817. The work is well worthy of perusal.

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

The name of Vancouver is identified with the discovery of our Pacific coast. An account of his voyage was published in six volumes in 1811. In a work published at Paris in 1798 an account is given in four volumes of the voyages of La Perouse, an unfortunate navigator, who, leaving France in 1785, was never heard of after his departure from Boany Bay in 1788. The introduction to these volumes gives an account of the attack of the war vessel "La Scourge," under the command of this navigator, upon the forts of Hudson's Bay. His name has also been connected with the discovery of the Vancouver Island region, but the account is very indefinite. A considerable number of works have been written on British Columbia and the west coast of this continent. We simply mention a few of these:—Dunn's Oregon, Love's Travels in British Columbia, and works by Ratray, Pemberton Mayne, & Macle on Vancouver Island and British Columbia.

THE RED RIVER.

The early history of the Red River country has been the subject of a number of papers already before this society. The early settlement of the country by Lord Selkirk's colonists, it is well known, was a stormy and dangerous one. Rival interests fought their battles over the heads of the inexperienced and innocent colonists. The rights and wrongs of the contestants, gave rise to a considerable literature between the years 1812 and 1830. The only connected account of the struggle referring to documents and official papers is that interesting volume lately published by Prof. Bryce. It is on the whole favorable to the Hudson's Bay Company's side of the matter, and is largely taken up with the vindication of the character and motives of the Earl of Selkirk. The history of Manitoba by the late Donald Gunn gives a version of the affair rather more from a north-western standpoint. But to any one desirous of perusing the investigations more fully himself, the following works are recommended viz., the "work of the Highland emigration" by the Earl of Selkirk, published in 1805; "a narrative of the destruction of the settlement of Red River in 1815," pamphlet against Lord Selkirk by Bishop Strachan, in 1816; a narrative of occurrences in the Indian country, published in London in 1817 (in favor of North-westers); Statement respecting the Earl of Selkirk's settlement on Red River (in favor of Lord Selkirk's side, also published in 1817); Sketch of the British fur trade, by Lord Selkirk, published in 1818; Letter to the Earl of Liverpool, by Lord Selkirk, in 1819; Report of Canadian trials in 1820 (there are two reports of these trials, one anonymous from a North-western, standpoint the other by A. Amos, on the opposite side). A vast amount of information bearing on the subject is found in the blue

book on the Red River settlement published by order of the Imperial Parliament in 1819. A very rare work, now out of print, was published in 1820, being "observations on the blue book of 1819." The union of the Northwest and Hudson Bay Companies tended very much to cover up and hide from view the events of this very eventful period of eight years in the history of Red River settlement.

LATER RED RIVER.

The history of the quiet, peaceful times that intervened between 1820 and 1870 when the country was transferred to Canada has been told in a fragmentary way by a number of writers. Among the first works of this period is a journal by the Rev. John West, the first church of England Missionary of the Red River settlement. This, an octavo volume, was published in London in 1824. Miss Tucker, the well-known writer, has given a pleasing sketch of the missions carried on in Rupert's Land, in her little work "The Rainbow of the North," published in 1858. In a two volume edition, published in 1849, entitled "Twenty-five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory," Mr. John McLean gives a somewhat lively account of the events transpiring in the quarter century preceding that date. As already mentioned, Mr. Alexander Ross's "Red River Settlement" gives a view of the country from its first days as a colony to the year 1856. The work on Red River, published by Mr. J. J. Hargrave—a member of this Society—in 1871, is especially valuable for chapters 6, 7, and 8, containing an account of the organization and system of the Hudson's Bay Company. An immense array of facts, geographical and historical, will be found in the blue book ordered by the Imperial Parliament in 1857. In his two volume work, published in 1847, "a narrative of a journey around the world" Sir George Simpson gives an account of his expedition through the Northwest, though there are rumors that another hand than his had much to do with the execution of the work. Every one is familiar with Milton and Cheadle's "Northwest passage by land," published in 1865, which is not too much to say has been the fruitful mother of many of the works of North-western travel that have since appeared. I must not forget to mention the exceedingly interesting and instructive works published by His Grace the Archbishop of St. Boniface; especially "twenty years of missions in the North-west of America" (1866), "Description of the Northwest of America" (1869), and "Sketch of the Northwest of America" (1870). I do not, of course, enter upon the field of literature connected with the exploration and description of the country since it became a part of Canada.

THE INDIANS.

There is still a wide field coming within the scope of this society's work—the Indian tribes that wander over our plains, with their history and ethnology. Not only would our ordinary well known Ojibways, Crees and Sioux afford a wide field, but the northwest tribes of Chipewyans and Esquimaux, with whom we are less acquainted, might well form subjects for papers before this society. When it is stated that Messrs. Clarke & Company, of Cincinnati, give the names of upwards of five hundred books upon the Indians it will be seen how hopeless any attempt of ours would be even to begin upon so vast a subject.

CONCLUSION.

I have thought this evening to bring before you the results of my gatherings on the important matters of interest to this Society. No doubt I have omitted noticing many most important clues and failed to mention important and even leading works upon the several topics touched on. Here in the Northwest is just springing up what is destined to be one of the greatest and grandest nations in the world. Our history is already an intense-

ly interesting one. We owe it to ourselves and to posterity to gather up all the fragments, and hand them down to the future. There are many old residents still alive who possess a vast amount of information of historical importance. I think we should make an effort to obtain that information, get it in print and it will then be at our command for all time to come. If we allow the present opportunity to pass, it will, in a few years, be lost forever. Winnipeg newspapers are engaged in recording the history to-day; still they take a deep interest in that of the past, and I know that they will gladly publish every thing concerning the history of the past that will be of value hereafter.

If the preparation of this paper results in leading to the more vigorous prosecution of the work of our society and in giving to our friends in the eastern Provinces a clearer idea of the vast field for historical research in the Northwest I shall be satisfied.

A discussion followed on the paper, in which Rev. Prof. Bryce, U. S. Consul Taylor, Rev. Mr. Pritchard, Ald. Ham and Rev. Prof. Hart took part.

After some business of a routine character was transacted, the meeting adjourned.



